

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

"The Gospel in the Carols: Jesus dies to save us"

Scripture: Romans 3:21-26 and John 1:29

Theme Carol: What child is this #161

Opening Hymn: Hail to the Lord's Anointed #115 (1,2,5)

Closing Hymn: Lo! Christ comes with clouds #120 Tune: CWM Rhondda #651

Children's Hymn: Emmanuel, Emmanuel 114

Choruses: In Christ Alone

Rev. Steve Filyk

December 15, 2019

3rd Sunday of Advent

Have you ever stared into the eyes of a newborn
And wondered what would become of them?
Have you ever watched a child playing
And pondered where they would end up in their lives?

Most mother and fathers,
grandmothers and grandfathers,
Aunts and uncles have dreams about their little ones.

We imagine the heights they will soar to.
How they will make their mark in music
or become champions in sport.
How they will cultivate a career that makes a difference in
the world.

But have you ever considered how that child might suffer
Or the sacrifices they may be asked to make?

Maybe you've heard about the Maltese journalist Daphne Galizia.
She made a career out of investigating corruption,
And was killed in 2017
when a bomb detonated inside her vehicle.ⁱ

Of course not every vocation is so risky,
but they all have different costs.

A friend who works in corrections told me that
while other people lounge in city parks during the summer,
while other people enjoy watching their kids
frolic on the playgrounds,
he just sees all the dirt-bags (his words)
that he's encountered in prison.

Ever consider what sort of sacrifices
your little ones will be asked to make?

PAUSE

Over the past few weeks we've been looking at our Christmas carols.
You may be surprised how much they have to teach us...

On the first Sunday of advent we were reminded that we are in trouble,
That we need a saviour.

"God rest ye merry gentlemen
Let nothing you dismay
Remember Christ our Savior
Was born on Christmas Day

To save us all from Satan's pow'r
When we were gone astray"ⁱⁱ

Last week we were told that God has stooped down
and has come among us in Jesus.

“Christ, by highest heaven adored,
Christ, the everlasting Lord,
late in time behold him come,
offspring of the Virgin's womb:

veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
hail th'incarnate Deity,
pleased with us in flesh to dwell,
Jesus, our Immanuel.”ⁱⁱⁱ

And this week,
although you'll note that the bulletin's sermon title
was not updated,

This week we are told that that the God who became man
Will suffer on our behalf.
Jesus dies to save us.

“Why lies he in such mean estate
where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christians, fear, for sinners here
the silent Word is pleading.

Nails, spear shall pierce him through,
the cross be borne for me, for you.”^{iv}

Today we hear that Jesus dies to save us.

The little child in the manger
will suffer for us.

It's not something that many people consider
When they look at a nativity scene,
and see the little babe.

But even when we are told about this,
It raises some big questions.

How does one person's suffering
become another person's salvation?

This involves a conversation about justice
And the long history of God's interaction with us...

Most of us have a pretty keen sense of justice.
We are pretty good at noticing
when we've been treated poorly.

Just imagine that your neighbor's dog
starts using your lawn for a bathroom.
The first couple times you might take it upon yourself
to clean up after him.

It might not even bother you.

But over time this behavior, if not remediated,
will cause a rift in the relationship with your neighbor.

You will get tired of taking care of the dog's messes.
You will start getting angry that your neighbor
Is either unaware or unconcerned.

You might leave them a nasty note,
Or throw those 'land-mines' back over the fence.

In this situation there's a pretty clear path to justice.
Your neighbor needs to clean your yard
And restrain their animal.

But what happens when the rift is caused by something more serious.
Maybe you drove over your neighbor's dog by accident?
Maybe you ran into that neighbor
and he ended up losing a leg...

Now restitution is trickier.
Now the authorities might even become involved.

Were you being reckless?
Were you driving without due care and attention?

If so how will you make amends with that neighbor.
More than that, how will you make amends with God.

The truth is, that if God is the creator of all,
We will all need to account to God
For the things that we have done
And the things we have left undone.

We have been designed to reflect God's image.
Anything we do that mars that good image causes offence.

So how will that relationship with our neighbor be mended
When there is no obvious restitution?
And how can we recover that image of God
That we've defaced.

In the world of the Bible
God himself provides a way to mend these broken relationships.
Atonement is accomplished through sacrifice.

One scholar notes that:

"The first (indirect) OT reference to atonement occurs
when God provided animal skins
to cover Adam and Eve's nakedness,
an act necessitating the death of a sinless animal...

This introduces a theme that runs throughout the Bible:
atonement involves an innocent party
taking the punishment that was due to a guilty party.

The Hebrew word translated "atonement" is kaphar, meaning "to cover."
This suggests that through the act of atonement
sin is covered so that God no longer sees it.

Throughout the OT the covering is achieved...
with the blood of an innocent animal
whose innocence renders the repentant sinner
innocent as well (Lv 1:4-5; 17:11).”^v

This is the way that God has dealt with sin in the past.

“But now” our epistle lesson begins.

“But now” God is satisfying the universe’s need for justice
In a better way.

Today’s lesson highlights what I shared with you two weeks ago,
We have a problem in our relationships:
“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”.^{vi}

That is, we fail to bearing God’s image.

This fact is well-attested by the story of the people of Israel.
The people God chose to bless have consistently failed
To honor God and live in right relationships with each other.

They failed in their task.
We do the same.

“But now” the passage tells us,
“but now” God has done something new for us.

We are told the good news, that we are:
“justified freely by his grace
Through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ.”^{vii}

We are justified—things are made right.

What this means is more than an acquittal.

We are judged to be in a right relationship,
And given the ability to bear God's image.

That sounds pretty incredible.

So how is this accomplished?

It is through the last and greatest sacrifice

That God offers in his son.

Jesus is the faithful image-bearer,

Who has rightly modelled God to the world.

This Jesus takes our place.

The innocent dies for the guilty.

The lamb of God is slaughtered
So that we can be reconciled with God and each other.

As the epistle writer tells us:

“God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement,
Through the shedding of his blood...”^{viii}

Jesus is the way that our sin is covered

And our broken relationships are mended.
We are given atonement through him.

PAUSE

A while ago I had a conversation with someone
Who was reflecting on their failings.

The person had done something very hurtful.
There was no obvious restitution.
No amends could ever be made.

The person recognized their guilt
But didn't know how to get out from under it.

"How do you find atonement?" the person asked.

The fact is that you don't find it.
You don't create it.
You don't earn it.

You simply welcome it as a gift.

A gift that has come through a little babe from Bethlehem.

ⁱ "Daphne Caruana Galizia" *Wikipedia*

ⁱⁱ "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen" English carol, 18th century

ⁱⁱⁱ Charles Wesley "Hark! The herald angels sing"

^{iv} William Chatterton Dix "What child is this" *The Book of Praise*

^v Ed Stetzer "A Closer Look: Jesus and Atonement in the Old Testament" January 25, 2012 *Christianity Today*
www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2012/january/closer-look-jesus-and-atonement-in-old-testament.html

^{vi} Romans 3:23 NIV

^{vii} Romans 3:24 NIV

^{viii} Romans 3:25 NIV